

**Submission
No 336**

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING PROCESS IN NEWCASTLE
AND THE BROADER HUNTER REGION**

Name: Mr Martin Cousins

Date received: 27/10/2014

24 October 2014

The Director / Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region
Parliament House, Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to raise my concern at the process that led to the decision to close the Newcastle rail line. I feel that the existing heavy rail line serves the people travelling by public transport between Newcastle, Sydney the Central Coast and Hunter Valley better than any proposed alternative. I am concerned about the process which led to the decision to close the line near Wickham.

I lived for many years in Muswellbrook and then Newcastle, before moving to Sydney, and at all of these times have found the existing rail line to be very useful. The existing arrangement allows people to travel between the Upper Hunter, Sydney and the Central Coast direct to the heart of Newcastle on the train. Any of the proposed alternatives would require people travelling to and from Newcastle or Civic stations to change mode, whether to the proposed light rail if it is ever built, or to buses. The inevitable waiting times and the inconvenience of the need to change transport modes can only lead to even greater numbers of current train users seeking other means of transport – most likely car. Surely with all the new businesses and apartments in Newcastle inner city and Honeysuckle there will be greater not lesser demand for good public transport.

There are many things that could be done to improve the existing heavy rail service for both train and other transport users. The lights at Stewart Avenue always used to co-ordinate poorly with the train crossing signals, leading to driver frustration. Surely these could be improved. The length of time that the rail gates are closed for a train to pass also seems excessive, compared to my experience of the Melbourne train system. There is also at least one opportunity for an additional level crossing in the vicinity of Civic, which should be implemented, not subject to a blanket ban on new level crossings.

I feel that the claim that the existing rail line divides the city is a false one if you consider developments in and around other train stations – St Leonards and Chatswood in Sydney for example. This could be achieved along the Newcastle rail corridor.

To close this corridor and replace it with an additional public transport mode makes no sense. To close it while the future of the corridor is uncertain (is it for the developers?) also seems short sighted. I request that the closure of the rail line be postponed at least until this Inquiry is complete, and better until a better public transport system is provided for the people who use the existing system!

Sincerely,

Martin Cousins